



DODGE COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

Dale J Schmidt Sheriff Scott Mittelstadt Chief Deputy

December Sheriff Column – Snow Plow Drivers Have a Tough Job

Have you taken time to thank those who work an unbelievable amount of hours in the winter months to keep our highways clear of snow and ice? Our highway department and local street departments work nights, weekends and holidays doing their part to keep our highways as safe as possible for the motoring public. As I was watching my son play with his toy snow plow in the heavy, wet snow that was coming down, the plow snapped off of it several times. While I was fixing it, I thought about those plow drivers who are not at home with their families like many of us are on this New Year's Eve because they are working to clear those same snow conditions off our highways.

Did you know that our Dodge County Highway Department (not including your local street departments or townships) clear 540.57 miles of County Truck Highways, 227.65 miles of State and US Highways, and 114 miles of town roads in our County? Now think about that fact that they have to drive each highway twice so they can clear it in each direction. That means they are responsible for 1764.44 miles for each storm. That is roughly the same distance as driving from Juneau, WI to Las Vegas, NV. But remember, that they don't just drive these roads one time, most storms they are required to travel the same roads multiple times as the storms last several hours or even days.

I thought this would help to bring perspective to drivers out there who get frustrated when their road isn't the first one plowed or when they get stuck behind a plow on the highway. While I am touching on that, why do plows only travel about 35 mph when plowing the roads you ask? If they drive faster than that, their trucks would not be able to clear the roads as well and the salt that they are spreading on the highway wouldn't stick to the road, but it would bounce off the road and into the ditch. Don't forget about the many obstacles they must avoid with their plows like mailboxes, sign posts and parked vehicles. Next time one of your mailboxes gets hit by a plow, remember just how many they are trying to avoid out there. It is bound to happen from time to time. It's also important to note that the force of the snow coming off the blade could have contributed to it being knocked over and the plow may not have struck it at all.

That brings me to abandoned vehicles. If your car breaks down on the side of the road, please call the sheriff's office so we can either assist you in removing it or give you guidance on if the car can be left there temporarily or if it needs to be removed immediately. Leaving cars on the highway is not only a hazard to the motoring public, but also creates additional obstacles for our plow drivers.

Finally, give the plow drivers room to operate out there. Remember that they may make movements on the road that you might not expect which includes making U-turns or

backing up at intersections. 200 feet is the minimum distance that you can legally follow a snowplow when the speed limit is 35 mph or more and the truck is actively removing snow or ice.

Driving in winter weather can certainly be challenging. Please slow down, give our plow drivers space and be patient with them as they work those long hours to make driving in winter weather easier. They do us a great service with very little recognition as they work hard to make Dodge County a safe place to live, work, and visit.

Sheriff Dale J. Schmidt